

**Testimony on 2013 Senate Bill 184
Senate Committee on Education**

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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on SB184. Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) supports this bill as a reasonable and necessary update to current law to account for the use of various types of social media in bullying behavior. Current law covers email but not other types of electronic means of communicating information.

MHA is particularly concerned about the relationship between bullying and mental health. The following conveys some of what we know about this relationship.

Wisconsin is home to one of the foremost researches in the area of cyber-bullying: Dr. Justin Patchin of the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire, who is co-director of the CyberBullying Research Center (www.cyberbullying.us). In a paper on their website, *The Current State of Cyberbullying Research: A Brief Summary*, the Center provides the following information:

- Anywhere from 15-35% of teens have experienced some form of cyberbullying, depending on who is sampled and how cyberbullying is defined and measured (see chart with our rates here). Some studies report lower or much higher rates, but we feel reasonably confident in estimating that about 20% of teens have been the victim of cyberbullying at some point in their lifetime (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, & Tippett, 2008).
- Cyberbullying is related to low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, frustration, and a variety of other emotional and psychological problems (Hinduja & Patchin, forthcoming; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, in review)
- Cyberbullying is related to other issues in the 'real world' including school problems, antisocial behavior, substance use, and delinquency (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008)

And issue brief on *Suicide and Bullying* on the website of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (http://www.sprc.org/sites/sprc.org/files/library/Suicide_Bullying_Issue_Brief.pdf) provides this additional information:

- Both victims and perpetrators of bullying are at a higher risk for suicide than their peers. Children who are both victims and perpetrators of bullying are at the highest risk (Kim & Leventhal, 2008; Hay & Meldrum, 2010; Kaminski & Fang, 2009).

- It is often the children most at risk for suicide who are bullied, which in turn further raises their risk of suicide (as well as of anxiety, depression, and other problems associated with suicidal behavior).
- A review of the research found that the relationship between bullying and suicide risk was stronger for LGB youth than for heterosexual youth (Kim & Leventhal, 2008).

For these reasons MHA urges you to support SB184.

Please feel free to contact me at 608-250-4368 or shelgross@tds.net if you have any questions.

Thank you.